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ABSTRACT

The relationship between elementary principals' perceived job stress and sex role is examined. Questionnaires mailed to a random stratified sample of 200 elementary principals in Washington state (50 females, 150 males) yielded 172 useable returns, an 86 percent response rate. Two measurement instruments were used: the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) which measures stress in relation to four factors indicating the multidimensional aspects of the construct. Task-based stress was found to be a significantly higher source of stress than three other factors--role-based, boundary-spanning, and conflict-mediating stress. No significant difference existed between sex roles and the four factors of perceived job stress or between the amount of job stress perceived by male and female principals. A conclusion is that stress is dependent on a variety of individual and external factors and that there are not easy answers to what causes it. Coping strategies are briefly discussed. (17 references) (LMI)

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SEX ROLES AND PERCEIVED JOB STRESS OF WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

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STRESS

Leaders in business and industry are generally considered most susceptible to stress. The leaders in our school systems are also exposed to comparable pressures. Stress is any action or situation placing physical and psychological demands upon a person that can unbalance an individual's equilibrium (Goens & Kuciejcyk, 1981). Stress can be viewed in a four stage cycle. Gmelch (1984) interprets Stage I as stressors or demands on the individual. These demands can range from job fragmentation and work overload to role and job ambiguity. The individual in Stage II has to perceive the demand. This reception leads to Stage III, the stress response which can lead to changes of behavior, psychologically or physiologically. Finally, in stage IV, stress can lead to the consequences of illnesses or disability.

Manera and Wright (1981) found convincing evidence that stress comes from a variety of sources. Some stress, eustress, comes from events generally considered positive. Other stress, distress, comes from events generally perceived negative. Stress in a positive sense exists as a motivator for the principal and teacher.

Tung (1980) compared occupational stress profiles of male versus female educational administrators. National Education Association reports that 70% of women work in the field of education, yet only 35% of the administrators are women. In a

preliminary study, Gmelch and Swent (1982) found that 60% of the administrators report that 70% of their total life stress resulted from their jobs. When Tung conducted a secondary analysis of Gmelch and Swent's data, she found that women principals experienced lower levels of perceived job stress then their male counterparts on all four factors of the Administrative Stress Index (ASI).

Farcus (1984) investigated the degree of occupational stress that public school principals perceive in work settings as to the relative impact of the variable of locus of control and situational powerlessness on their level of stress. The findings suggest that principals with low internal locus of control perceive greater job stress than those with higher internal locus of control. Farkus found that female principals, as a group, experience lower levels of stress than male principals.

Another study by Bartol and Butterfield (1976) suggested that females neither experience the stress levels perceived by men nor do they suffer effects of stress to the same degree. A possible explanation of this conclusion was developed. Female principals perceive less stress because subordinates may respond differently, possibly less aggressively, to their administrative authority and managerial style then they do to male principals. This, in turn, may lead to a lessened amount of interpersonal conflict with their

colleagues.

SEX ROLE DIFFERENCES

Androgyny is a concept that an adult of either sex can have both masculine and feminine characteristics (Bem 1974). Those individuals considered androgynous will perform sex-reversed activities. They can be dominant and tender, forceful and compassionate, aggressive and willing to soothe hurt feelings, and a leader and follower. Many researchers believe an androgynous person is more adaptable and clever in problem solving, and able to function in a reasonable manner in producing positive results. Sargent (1981) stated that the androgynous person provides an open ended path to growth and development by encouraging individuals to encompass the entire range of human behaviors. Studies by many researchers have suggested that androgynous individuals are more flexible in their behavior patterns.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects for this study were selected from the 1989 Washington State Elementary School Principals. The listing of these principals was obtained from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Two hundred subjects were selected to participate in the study. The subjects were randomly selected and stratified. This ensured the proportion of male and female subjects were the same

as the actual proportions of elementary male and female principals within the state: 25% or fifty subjects were female elementary principals, 75% or 150 subjects were male elementary principals.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to determine if perceived job stress among the State of Washington Elementary Principals was related to the principals' sex role, as determined by the Bem Sex -Role Inventory (BSRI). The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) was used to determine the perceived job stress. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory Short Form was used to determine the subjects sex role of the male and female principals.

INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory has two forms of the exam to measure a persons masculinity and femininity. The BSRI is a 60 question form and the BSRI short form consists of 30 questions. The BSRI will distinguish an individual on a masculinity-femininity scale. It has two independent dimensions and the person indicated whether they are masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated based on score responses. Both forms of the BSRI have a 7 point Likert scale ranging from (1), *never to almost never*; to (7), *always or almost always true*, to measure characteristics of stereotypically masculine and feminine behaviors. The BSRI short form has 30 questions in which the subject is to describe himself or

herself. Of the thirty questions, ten questions are masculine characteristics such as assertive and forceful. Ten questions contain feminine characteristics such as affectionate and understanding. The final ten questions are filler items such as adaptable and reliable. The form is set up in a manner that the first characteristic is masculine, second is feminine, and the third is a filler item. The form continues in this pattern for all 30 characteristics. The test/retest reliability for the BSRI short form ranges from .76 to .91. The correlation ranges from .85 to .94. The test/retest reliability and correlation vary depending on the gender of the subject and the femininity-masculinity scale. Sandra Bem (1981) asserts that masculinity and femininity are complementary not opposite domains of trait and behavior. An individual of either sex may be both masculine and feminine or instumental and expressive depending on the given situation. Individual traits and behaviors are related to each person's sex-role indentity, not sex. BSRI treats masculinity and femininity as two separate dimensions which can be combined to different sex-role identities of undifferentiated, masculine, feminine, and androgynous.

The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) was developed to measure the job related stress perceived by school administrators (Gmelch & Swent, 1984). The ASI has a five point Likert scale ranging from (1), *rarely of never bothers me*; to (5), *frequently*

bothers me. The questionnaire has four factors indicating the multidimensional aspects of the construct. First is Role-Based Stress, which pertains to the administrator's beliefs, attitudes and interactions about their role within the organization. The second factor, Task-Based Stress, is comprised from the performance of one's daily administrative tasks. This includes activities of communication and coordination, and may place time restrictions on the administrator. Boundary-Spanning Stress is the third factor. The occupational stress in this factor evolves from the external environment such as collective bargaining and gaining public support for school levies. The fourth factor is Conflict -Mediating Stress, such as stress stemming from resolving parent/school conflicts and handling discipline problems.

The ASI is a comprehensive assessment of perceived job related stress. It does not examine objective characteristics of the environment.

PROCEDURE

Surveys were sent out to 200 randomly selected, stratified Washington elementary principals. The surveys consisted of three sections: Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), Administrative Stress Index (ASI), and a questionnaire of demographics.

RESULTS

Two hundred questionnaires were sent to Washington Elementary principals. From the 200 questionnaires sent, 177 questionnaires were returned and 172 were usable, resulting in an 86% response rate. There were 41 female respondents and 131 male respondents.

The data were analyzed by using a 4x4 (Sex-Role by Perceived Job Stress) analysis of variance.

> Hypothesis 1. There will be no significant difference in perceived job stress of elementary principals who are classified as feminine, masculine, undifferentiated, or androgynous, as determined by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory.

Hypothesis 1 is rejected. A significant value was found for the mean of the sex roles, $F(3,672)=3.82$, $p<.01$. Application of the Tukey test revealed a significant value ($p<=.05$) between the feminine and undifferentiated sex roles.

Undifferentiated elementary principals were found to have a significantly lower amount of perceived job stress than the feminine elementary principals. No significant values were found between the amount of perceived job stress of the masculine, androgynous, and undifferentiated elementary principals.

Hypothesis 2. There will be no significant difference in the four factors of perceived job stress among the elementary principals.

Hypothesis 2 is rejected. A significant value was found for the mean value of perceived job stress, $F(3,672)=8.09$, $p<.001$. Application of the Tukey test revealed significance ($p<=.05$) of task-based stress with boundary-spanning, role-based, and conflict-mediating stress. Significance was also revealed between conflict-mediating stress and boundary-spanning stress.

Task-based stress was found to be significantly higher than the other three factors of perceived job stress. Conflict-mediating stress was significantly higher than boundary-spanning stress.

Hypothesis 3. There will be no significant interaction between the subjects job stress and sex role classifications.

Hypothesis 3 was accepted. There was no significant interaction of the sex roles and perceived job stress. The interaction revealed no significance values, $F(9,672)=0.93$, $p<0.5$.

The data from the interaction of the sex roles and perceived job stress reveals no significant difference between the cells. Comparison of the means between sex roles and factors of perceived job stress also yielded no significant values.

Hypothesis 4. There will be no significant difference between the factors of perceived job stress and gender of elementary principals.

Hypothesis 4 was accepted. An analysis of variance revealed no significant values in the amount of perceived job stress between male and female elementary principals. These results would suggest that perceived job stress of elementary principals is not related to gender.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the analysis suggest that the principals classified as feminine perceived significantly higher amounts of stress than those principals classified as undifferentiated, as determined by the BSRI and ASI.

Principals who perceived task-based stress were significantly higher than the other three factors of stress. Significance was also found with conflict-mediating stress being higher than boundary-spanning stress.

There was no significant interaction between the sex roles and the four factors of perceived job stress. And, there were no significant differences between the amount of perceived job stress of male and female principals.

The amount of perceived job stress within an individual is dependent upon many factors. There are many personal and environmental factors that can bring on stressors within each individual. Every person perceives stressors differently and experience with a specific stressor can bring on a quick cure or a

prolong stress. There are no easy answers to what causes stress or stressors.

COPING SUGGESTIONS

This study was not concerned with coping skills, but it suggested that coping skills need to be acquired. Friends, church groups, organizations, and professionals can definitely help in reducing the amounts of perceived job stress (Lemley, 1981).

Fallon (1981) suggest that administrators should live a well rounded life with proper diet and rest. There should be enough exercise in one's life to ward off any of the day's anxiety and keep the body healthy.

Research completed by Gmelch and Swent (1981) advocate that administrators should acquire proper management techniques to minimize the task-based stress. Understanding where and when principals should spend their time is very important. By making a daily log, principals could keep a list of how they are spending their time.

Brief (1980) recommends that communication skills need to be perfected. Proper communication between administrative team, staff, students, and community members can minimize many stressful situations.

Organization and proper leadership can keep the stress to a minimum level. Administrators should meet the stress head on

and not delay in trying to resolve it. Procrastination only prolongs the stress, making it worse (Brief, 1980).

In conclusion, stress may always be present in an administrative position. It is impossible and inadvisable that administrators can completely delete stress from their occupation. However, it is feasible that principals can minimize the amount of negative stress they experience in their position. Principals must monitor their behavior to provide the necessary change in their life and occupation in order to diminish the amount of perceived job stress.

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